

DEUCALION

OR

THE FUTURE OF LITERARY CRITICISM

TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

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of this Book*

DEUCALION

OR

THE FUTURE OF LITERARY CRITICISM

BY

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LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRUBNER & Co., Ltd
NEW YORK: E P DUTTON & Co.

1930

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
M F. ROBINSON & CO. LTD., AT THE LIBRARY PRESS, LOWESTOFT

TO
JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY
AND
I. A. RICHARDS
LINKED IN A COMMON ADMIRATION,

CONTENTS

CHAP		PAGE
I	THE REVIEWER AS CRITIC .	9
II	THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CRITICAL . . .	18
III	CRITICS AS REVIEWERS . .	41
IV	CRITICS AT WAR . . .	50
V	TOWARDS THE FUTURE . .	74
	EPILOGUE . . .	93

NOTE

The need to show that this essay has a genuine basis in current critical thinking necessitates some quotation from contemporary writers. I wish to make grateful acknowledgments to the authors and publishers of the various passages cited, and especially to Mr I A Richards and Mr J M Murry. I have also made use of some matter originally contributed to the "Times Literary Supplement", and my thanks are due to the Editor for his permission to do so.

G W

DEUCALION

OR

THE FUTURE OF LITERARY CRITICISM

I

THE REVIEWER AS CRITIC

Whatever the Future of Literary Criticism, there is no doubt at all as to its animated present. In both England and America it is to-day a major literary activity; in some respects it might claim to be the characteristic literary activity of the period. Most of the vitally influential minds now engaged in creative literary work display obvious critical leanings, explicit or implicit—one need only mention Messrs T. S. Eliot, Ford Madox Ford, E. M. Forster, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Lytton Strachey, and Mrs Virginia Woolf

DEUCALION

—while criticism as such draws within the circle of its fascination an even greater proportion of the best-known writers of our day. Everybody writes criticism, even if, as editors say, nobody reads it. A mere list is in itself sufficient proof. Among English writers may be named: Messrs Lascelles Abercrombie, Richard Aldington, John Bailey, Clive Bell, Arnold Bennett, A. C. Bradley, Robert Bridges, G. K. Chesterton, H. P. Collins, Bonamy Dobrée, Hugh I'Anson Fausset, H. W. Garrod, Gerald Gould, Robert Graves, E. E. Kellest, Percy Lubbock, Robert Lynd, F. L. Lucas, Desmond MacCarthy, Sturge Moore, Edwin Muir, Gilbert Murray, John Middleton Murry, Henry Newbolt, Harold Nicholson, J. B. Priestley, Arthur Quiller-Couch, Herbert Read, I. A. Richards, Edgell Rickword, R. Ellis Roberts, George Saintsbury, R. A. Scott-James, Edward Shanks, J. C. Squire, Frank Swinnerton, Arthur Symons, W. J. Turner, Sherard Vines, T. E. Welby, Orlo Williams, Humbert Wolfe, Leonard Woolf; and among Americans: Messrs Irving Babbitt, Thomas Beer, Max Bodenheimer, Ernest

LITERARY CRITICISM

Boyd, Van Wyck Brooks, Heywood Broun, W. C. Brownell, H. S. Canby, Arthur Colton, Wilbur Cross, Elmer Davis, Floyd Dell, Carl van Doren, John Erskine, Joseph Wood Krutch, Brander Matthews, H. L. Mencken, Paul Elmer More, Christopher Morley, Lewis Mumford, George Jean Nathan, Grant Overton, Bliss Perry, W. L. Phelps, John Cowper Powys, George Santayana, Stuart Sherman, Harold Stearns, Ernest Sutherland and Louis Untermeyer—the lists are inclusive but by no means exhaustive.

Yet this profusion of evident talent and industry leads, it is found, not to richness and concentration, but to confusion of purpose and diffusion of energy. There is a total lack of general agreement upon any single point whatsoever, whether ethical or aesthetic, and the effect is one of jungle-like growth engulfing individual effort, until the wearied explorer stumbles and finally halts, baffled by so chaotic a luxuriance. The ordinary unadventurous reader probably finds this diversity of purpose and opinion most clearly reflected in the review columns of

DEUCALION

the daily and weekly newspapers. The *Observer* grants half a page of praise to a novel the *Daily News* dismisses as all but worthless, and what the *Nation* or *Spectator* receives respectfully the *New Statesman* hurls into a corner with scorn and scoffing. The printing side by side of directly contradictory comments upon a book or author is a familiar trick in publishers' advertisements, and even within the columns of the same paper there can be found at times startlingly divergent opinions.

In many cases such divergencies have, of course, no relation to critical opinion. A book review, Mr Robert Lynd once hopefully suggested, ought at least to be alive as news, but those who control our more popular newspapers are evidently of the opinion that books are news only when they happen to be written by such public entertainers as Sir Harry Lauder, Lady Oxford, Signor Mussolini, or Mr Bernard Shaw. Thus the tendency is, in both the daily papers and the cheaper weeklies, either to abolish reviews altogether or—what amounts to the same thing critically—to retain them

LITERARY CRITICISM

simply as a bait for publishers' advertisements. Many editors, even literary editors, go so far as to foretell (privately) the complete extinction of book reviews as a regular newspaper feature, and with the honourable exceptions of a few papers of the type of the *Times*, *Morning Post*, and *Manchester Guardian* the process is visibly in being. Meanwhile reviewing affords pin-money for the editorial or publishing staff, and in the result there is not a book so worthless that some natural nincompoop or friend of the author will not appear to proclaim it a work of genius. Undoubtedly not a little reviewing is dishonest in the sense of being dictated by either personal feeling or the advertisement department, but a good deal more, and in more reputable quarters, is simply incompetent. The reviewer lacks any critical background, and the book is a masterpiece or an abomination according to his mood of the moment.

The cheaper literary weeklies are little better. They practise the art of appreciation, and almost all but vitally original books stand an equal chance of undis-

DEUCALION

tinguished praise. We don't want criticism, their franker editors declare, and they have the discretion of their conviction. So matters go from bad to worse, until Mr James Douglas can acclaim the "fine novels" of Katherine Mansfield, or Mr T. P. O'Connor prefer Tchekov's short stories to "any of his long books", without even an echo of laughter rising to shake their pontifical thrones.

It is in the weeklies of wider and more intelligent appeal (the *Observer* and *Sunday Times* may be included) that some of the most truly critical reviewing will be found, yet even they—too easily though they run to cliques, for ours is a day of coteries without academies—are distinguished by catholicity of taste rather than by any individual critical standpoints. The *New Statesman* is often notably good, but it can be notably erratic, the *Nation*, if less vivid, is much more successful in preserving its air of detached, slightly ironical, good taste even in its occasional—very occasional—fervours and antipathies. The *Spectator* serves an essentially sober-minded

LITERARY CRITICISM

public with an evident sense of its responsibility. The *Times Literary Supplement* carries of its nature a certain amount of dead matter, but its level on the whole is amazingly high, and its world-reputation is well earned; its reviews, more than those of any other weekly paper published in this country, are truly critical, and as reviews indeed sometimes suffer from that very fact.

For reviewing, when all is said and done, is not criticism, nor criticism reviewing. Something subtler is called for than the simple distinction made by one American writer that a hack is just a reviewer overworked, and a critic a reviewer with leisure. Mr Lynd suggests that a review should be a portrait of a book, and if the acceptance of his precept does not commit one to his practice, the phrase is sufficiently exact. Criticism, on the other hand, according to Remy de Gourmont, is the erecting of personal impressions into laws. Every reviewer of any merit at all is necessarily a critic, and every good review contains some wider reference which illuminates not

DEUCALION

only the individual work in the light of literature as a whole, but also literature as a whole in the light of the individual work; nevertheless there is between reviewing and criticism the difference of an emphasis upon particular or general. Reviewing, that is, to become criticism, must rise above its immediate purpose.

Clearly then the student of criticism must concern himself primarily not with periodical reviews and the groups which write them, but with books and individuals. Yet there he will find not less but even more diversity. Down in the forest there is a fluttering of innumerable wings, and the song of the prophetic nightingale is drowned amid the arrogant chatter of the parrots. There are to-day, in Mrs Woolf's phrase, "a million competent and incorruptible policemen but no judge"—useless to ask *them* the way, for they are much too busy contradicting each other ever to have looked for it. If, therefore, we would discern what in contemporary criticism has significance for the future, we must be ready to hack our own ways through the tangled

LITERARY CRITICISM

undergrowth until we may perchance come upon a clearing from whence to scan such constant stars as will give us, in our moment of isolation at least, our bearings.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING
CRITICAL

Many conditions, Tolstoy asserted, must be fulfilled if a man is to produce great art, but first and foremost he must stand upon the level of the highest life-conception of his time. To-day, in England, and in Europe and America generally, no such life-conception prevails. The intellectual life equally with the social—the complete range of mental associations and attitudes—is in the melting-pot. The tall towers of our faiths have been brought low; ideals once thought stable have been shattered by science, by war, by growing individualism to nothingness, and however much we may feel with old Tom Smallways, that it didn't ought ever to have begun, still the fact remains—to be dealt with. "Indeed", suggests Mr Bonamy Dobrée,

LITERARY CRITICISM

and corroboration is general, "it is safe to say that at no modern period has the world seemed so empty a thing, the universe so indifferent, our values so factitious; and as we look back upon the centuries we can see that this attitude has been fatefully coming upon us."¹ It has been coming upon us, actively and with increasing power, since the Renaissance, when a new consciousness came to birth, and the forerunners of a community of will appeared like God's spies amid a community of faith and obedience.

"The essential fact of the Renaissance was that man asserted his independence of an external spiritual authority. It was a movement of expansion and growth, which became vaguely conscious of itself because of the New Learning. Men, who had long been silently chafing against the restraints of an established and omnipotent religion which by the mere magnitude of its organisation had lost contact with the individual soul, gained con-

The Lamp and the Lute, p 61.

DEUCALION

fidence in their own impulses from the sudden revelation of an epoch before their own. They saw that a time had been when the spirit of free inquiry had flourished, and men like themselves had lived outside the shadow of the terror of death and the life to come. The veil of mist that had obscured the past from them and made them feel that the dispensation under which they lived was established in the very nature of the universe was suddenly rolled away. They could see what had been; therefore they could see that what was was not absolute, but relative, not the eternal creation of God, but the temporal handiwork of man.”¹

They saw, in short, that their authority was not authoritative; and the final deduction from this—reached only by a long and painful progress in which the Reformation and its consequences marked the first forward steps—was the knowledge that in himself alone, so far as he is concerned, is it possible for a man to

¹ J. M. Murry, *Unknown God*, pp. 171-2.

LITERARY CRITICISM

know any final authority. He threw away the burden of God-consciousness to take up the burden of self-consciousness, from faith in God as the only ultimate reality he turned to hope in Man as the only sure reality. The implied movement from medieval to modern thinking is not yet complete: the essential fact of the contemporary situation is that upon us has fallen the most critical stage of the transition. The natural conservatism of the human intelligence has evoked one false image after another to fill the void—the Newtonian World Machine in the Age of Reason, the pseudo-Romantic evangelicalism of the mid-nineteenth century—so that only of recent years has the collapse of the medieval synthesis penetrated all levels of consciousness, even where it is denied. In Mr Santayana's phrase, the shell of Christendom is broken, and so the values of Christian Catholicism—for so long the ruling European values—become more and more ineffective, disguise it as we may. M. Fernandez has declared Thomism to be a metaphysic incommensurable with the modern experimental intelligence,

DEUCALION

because it does not belong to "the same spiritual baking", and even the late T. E. Hulme, holding the modernist view to be demonstrably false, acknowledged as a fact the prevailing inability to understand the meaning of the Thomist dogmas of Original Sin and salvation by Catholic discipline. Increasingly during the last three hundred years organised religion has ceased to embody the highest prevailing life-conception, and men have moved more and more in doubt and darkness, more and more out of touch with tradition. The nineteenth century in particular was a period of collapsing and evaporating values, of cumulative disillusion, and the effect of the war was merely to crystallize realization of that collapse; it was no more than a winter tempest making plain to us our nakedness. To-day, confirms Mr Edwin Muir, we have "a generation who in their universal uncertainty doubt even such terms as the world and the mind, are sceptical of any conclusions which may be drawn from the existence of these things, and are prepared to accept only the sensations they feel and the

LITERARY CRITICISM

deceptions practised by everybody to conceal them".¹

For what has occurred has gone deeper even than a change of attitude: there has been a change—amounting almost to disintegration—of consciousness. Numerous writers have noted in the post-Renaissance individual the marked disassociation of thought and feeling, leading in many cases to a doubt of the whole conception of personality. Medieval man achieved a natural mental unity in the subordination of emotion and intellect alike to faith in God, but with the gradual recession of faith that unity has been progressively disrupted, and a widening gulf driven between emotional need and intellectual knowledge; the immediate problem is to achieve a new synthesis which without invoking faith can satisfy both aspects of the individual being at once. In its absence the breakdown, the sense of aimlessness and futility, can only increase, continually gathering power and conviction. The situation has been aptly summed up by Mr H. S. Canby in his

¹ *Transition*, p 107.

DEUCALION

account of the typical hero of the modern American autobiographical novel :

“ He encounters disillusion after disillusion. At the age of seven or thereabouts he sees through his parents and characterizes them in a phrase. At fourteen he sees through his education and begins to dodge it. At eighteen he sees through morality and steps over it. At twenty he loses respect for his home-town, and at twenty-one discovers that our social and economic system is ridiculous. At twenty-three his story ends because the author has run through society to date and does not know what to do next.”¹

There we have a very precise statement of the modern dilemma. More and more does it appear to men, testing one unknown quantity after another, that $X=O$, and the sense of a total lack of values is extraordinarily widespread. Recently Mr Walter Lippmann published in America a study of morals based on the idea that man can no longer take

¹ *Definitions*, I, p 151.

LITERARY CRITICISM

seriously any religious authority: the book sold like a successful novel!

It is true that for many minds the sense of conflagration lends an added attraction to Neronian fiddling, but Nero was by all accounts a rotten fiddler, and we grow weary of the smile that won't come off the boyishly innocent features of Mr Beverley Nichols, drearily reiterating in his "happy agnosticism" that "futility can be great fun". Not a little of modern literature—from the late Ronald Firbank (of whom as a writer it is sufficient to say that in Sodom he would have been not at home but at a loss) to Mr James Joyce, whom in his moments of lucidity *Glory* still adorns—is so ruthlessly exotic and experimental simply because it has lost contact with any background of values. Formlessness in literature is the immediate reflection of formlessness in thought and living, and though life functioning in the void may seem temporarily to offer freedom, it soon proves ineffective and unsatisfying. To-day the metaphysical problem as a personal issue looms above and encloses the creative artist or thinker as inexorably

DEUCALION

as the arching sky, to be evaded only upon a confession of blindness or impotence. We meet a hundred men upon the road to Delhi, and they are all our brothers because, whether travelling east or west, south or north, they are spurred by this same necessity. Darkness is over the face of the deep—but to-day we can invoke no spirit of God to brood creatively upon the waters. Man in his independence must fashion his own universe. We are critical because we are forced to be questioning. New forms, new values, must be found and established.

That this is essentially a critical task has been generally accepted ever since Matthew Arnold's famous declaration that "it is the business of the critical power . . . to make an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself".¹ Philosophy, psychology, even physics, may contribute, but the crystallization of human values is primarily an artistic activity, and their discernment a critical one. Mr

¹ *Essays in Criticism* (1865), p. 6.

LITERARY CRITICISM

E. E. Kellett, in his recent essay *The Whirligig of Taste*, flung down the gauntlet in a challenge to the whole validity of criticism as lacking any permanent principles: "The one thing certain is that there is no certainty." But his attack fails because of the curious confusion he makes between taste and criticism. Certainly taste is the basis of criticism, but criticism is much more than the spontaneous expression of taste. Taste, in Mr Kellett's simple sense of what one fancies at any given moment, is fundamentally unconscious and haphazard; criticism, if it has any value at all, is equally essentially conscious and organized. Criticism has well been called the consciousness of art; it might with equal truth be called the consciousness of taste. It is precisely the variability of taste with every mood which defeats Mr Kellett, our opinion of a poem or a tale changes, he declares, in consequence of indigestion or a paragraph in the sporting news, and he is overwhelmed by the inadequacy of generalization to cope with the inconsistencies of human nature. "We are

DEUCALION

forced to admit that there are more things in human nature than are dreamt of in our psychology. No formula will satisfy the human equation, and there are points in every one of us that refuse to fit in with any definition.”¹ This may be the natural reaction of anyone faced by the contradictions of contemporary criticism, but to admit it as final is to abandon not only criticism but all art and all values too: we are left with nothing but a series of manifestations to be classed and re-classed according to their momentary appeal. In fact it is not final. To deny a man complete consistency is not to deny him prevailing consistency. An army in progress is a network of individuals moving forward, backward, sideways, and across, yet it has as a whole characteristic movement; and though these individuals may hold every opinion concerning war, still it has homogeneity of purpose. Similarly a man has homogeneity, character: where there is change there is more than continuity, there is development. And as

¹ *Whirligig of Taste*, p. 107

LITERARY CRITICISM

with the man so with the age: that too has continuity, homogeneity, prevailing character and tendency. No generalization can tell the whole truth, but it can tell the greater part of it.

It is precisely at this point that the critic enters. Inoculated as it were by self-consciousness against the influence of each passing mood, intensely aware of the prevailing tendencies of his own character, he combines with this awareness his knowledge of the prevailing tendencies of his own time, in order to estimate as far as may be in the perspective of the prevailing tendencies of the past the value of any given work to himself and to similarly minded contemporary readers. (Mr Kellett is right in asserting that the critic must write for his own day—but how many writers of any talent at all have ever done anything else?) Criticism, in the phrase quoted above, is the consciousness of art; it might, even more explicitly, be called art's book-keeper, keeping the accounts of art, recording past achievement and the steady flow of tradition, setting this to credit, that to debit, and

DEUCALION

continually presenting to the reader a balance-sheet of obsolete and foreign values in terms of contemporary currency. But criticism serves not only the reader ; it serves, as Matthew Arnold saw and insisted, the artist too—serves him, not dictates to him ! Ideally criticism is the keeper of the tradition, and not the artistic only but the human tradition. It makes explicit those life-values implicit in the work of art, and so has indeed a claim to be the guardian of human values. Looking into the past, studying those prevailing tendencies which must be insisted upon as valid as well as discernible, the critic is able to sketch a graph recording not merely the progress of this or that branch of artistic expression, but something of the progress of the human soul itself. There is a criticism which—like art itself, the highest art—is based upon and is true to not only human ideas but human nature, and so stands fast amid the flux of ideas, and retains its validity even when a new stage of human development is entered upon. In a finite world the quest for any absolute criterion is

LITERARY CRITICISM

necessarily doomed from the beginning ; but upon these lines of a truth to fundamental human nature and human values may be traced, perhaps, the foundations of a criticism as "relatively absolute" as can be conceived or is called for. It is certainly one competent to undertake the task which especially faces it to-day.

The urgency of that task has already been made evident. Mr Logan Pearsall Smith rejects the claim that we may be on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature precisely because of our lack of what is essential to all great ages—an underlying body of unanimous ideas about life. In the great literary periods, asserts Mr H. P. Collins, "powerful individuality has acquired strength and significance by its relation to an accepted spiritual and cultural centre. The value of diversity is in an underlying homogeneity."¹ Mr Edwin Muir is equally definite, pointing regretfully to the qualities of contemporary literature as notably those of an age of transition.

¹ *Modern Poetry*, p. 145.

DEUCALION

All agree that lacking a tradition we lapse of necessity into a literary provincialism—a matter, it must be insisted, of infinitely greater moment to-day than five hundred years ago, for since the Renaissance literature (which throughout this essay may be taken to imply and not to exclude the arts generally) has increasingly supplanted the Christian Churches as the vehicle of the highest knowledge. Pre-Renaissance man lived wholly within the intellectual pattern the Church imposed upon him. But once he pierced the skin of the encircling bubble and it burst about him, once he accepted the burden of spiritual emancipation, the finest personal expression of the highest and completest personal experience became naturally and necessarily the highest knowledge. Significance inhered in he who plunged deepest and dared farthest, bringing back to the tiny island of the known the fullest and most articulate accounts. These are to be found in literature, imaginative literature. Science, measuring the quantitative universe, is essential only for its reverberations in the qualitative sphere.

LITERARY CRITICISM

Philosophy is of its nature intellectual ; it fails to express or to satisfy the whole man. In art alone does that whole man find adequate expression, and to creative literature must men look for the embodiment of living values appropriate to our epoch.

So to Mr Eliot's dictum that it is the critic's business to preserve tradition where a good tradition exists, it must be added that where it does not it is the critic's business to create it. The tasks of artist and critic are dissimilar and in a sense contradictory, and the poet who is compelled to forge his own philosophy as well as write his own poetry is the less likely to achieve his highest poetic possibilities. Moreover, he demands, he needs, an intelligent critical reception. The American stifling and deformation of genius from Melville and Poe onward points a clear lesson. The artist is the quintessential individual, the self-created man, spontaneously flowering out from his own deepest roots, and he grows in the loneliness of his soul—there and there only. But at the same time he is human, a social being : he needs fellowship, a

DEUCALION

sympathetic and, more, a discriminating audience. In a world in which the spiritual values of art are rejected and despised—or simply not comprehended—he needs to be a phenomenal individual not to be overwhelmed, and even so he wastes his creative strength in winning to that level the more favourably situated artist would unconsciously start from. All this Tchegov implied when he urged Gorky to come to Moscow or Petersburg: “A writer cannot live in the provinces with impunity. . . . The natural condition of a writer is always to keep close to literary circles, to live near writers, to breathe literature.”¹

Thus, at such a crisis, and with such a necessity in view, criticism cannot claim importance if it offers appreciation, unqualified or discriminating, alone. To be significant it must draw values from existing creative work and explicitly define and rank them; it must in that sense be itself creative—of values. To achieve profundity it must be, in Mr Orlo Williams’ phrase, a voyage into

¹ *Adelphi*, Nov 1923.

LITERARY CRITICISM

the unknown in which the critic's task becomes co-extensive with philosophy, history, psychology, life itself. The critic must be geographer or archeologist rather than a simple Cook's guide to literary tourists. And, very necessarily, he must be modern in outlook. It is impossible to revive to-day a purely Greek Classicism, for example; the human mind has moved forward. Both the life of Jesus and the Renaissance marked stages in the growth of human consciousness, and we must accept that progress. It is useless to wave flags towards a deserted outpost. That is why such a critic as Mr G. K. Chesterton may be dismissed—despite many pages of good if erratic critical writing—without any discussion at all. Simply he has no message and no meaning for the modern mind. His assertion that Bottom expresses "much better" than Hamlet "the aesthetic dreams and the bewilderment of the intellect" is utter nonsense. Undoubtedly Bottom may express better the dreams and bewilderment of Mr Chesterton, but that is because they are both medieval, while in Hamlet was

DEUCALION

miraculously achieved the first great embodiment of the essentially modern self-conscious, self-questioning mind. It is no coincidence that Mr Chesterton has become a Catholic.

To sum up: The significant critic for to-day is the philosophical critic, and indeed upon this the most eminent of living critics of the most diverse schools are fully agreed. "It is philosophical criticism of which we stand in desperate need at this moment,"¹ writes Mr Murry; and Mr Eliot: "In our time the most vigorous minds are philosophical minds, are, in short, creative of values."² Other critics may perform their function for the passing hour; it is to the work of the philosophical critics that attention must be turned to discern what writing in our own day has importance equally for the criticism of the future and the future of criticism.

(To an English observer, the American situation would appear to be similar in essence but distinctly less acute.

¹ *Aspects of Literature*, p. 180.

² *Criterion*, Oct 1926.

LITERARY CRITICISM

America, mechanistically ahead of us, is intellectually still in the stage of materialistic triumph which came to its English climax in the mid and late Victorian years. Many observers have noted the existence in America of a definite intelligentsia class similar to that of Tsarist Russia, and criticism, like the conscious scepticism which impels it, is largely the unenvied possession of an exasperated minority. Yet Mr H. S. Canby some five years ago noted an era of American literary criticism as well under way, and the increasing degree to which works of art tended to be critically minded. There is a definite revolt in progress against the reign of the once all-powerful mandarins pre-eminently represented to-day by Messrs Paul Elmer More, Bliss Perry, Brander Matthews, Henry van Dyke, William Lyon Phelps, and Wilbur Cross. Mr Van Wyck Brooks' *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*, though the author when he wrote it walked a little blinded by the psycho-analytical vision, stated clearly the conflict between the pioneer and the artist minds, the past and the present,

DEUCALION

which lie at the roots of the movement. Life and art have always been kept well apart in America in the past ; the present effort is to bring them together and disclose their mutual relevance. What has happened is, however, that the professors have given place to the journalists. An unreal aesthetic has been ousted by no aesthetic at all. "The chief fault of American criticism is its warm hospitality to second-rate striving," says Mr George Jean Nathan. "Everything that has been written in praise of Sherwood Anderson and Dreiser has at one time or another been written also of James Oliver Curwood."¹ As a whole American criticism of the more intelligent type is still too largely dominated by radical reaction ; much of Mr H. L. Mencken's work, for example, is admirable counter-attacking, but it is scarcely criticism. Mr H. S. Canby adequately fulfils his declared function of "liaison officer" between life and literature, but more on the level of everyday living than of high constructive thought. Messrs

¹ *Land of Pilgrims's Pride*, pp. 195-6.

LITERARY CRITICISM

Harold Stearns, Van Wyck Brooks, Ernest Boyd, Heywood Broun, Christopher Morley, Stuart Sherman, Elmer Davies, and Arthur Colton are all doing commendable and valuable work in clearing up and adjusting contemporary values. Mr Joseph Wood Krutch, not much known in England, has individual importance for his philosophical background, though perhaps over-exclusively intellectual. The most genuinely constructive philosophical effort, but hampered by a lack of clarity in its fundamental conceptions of Classicism and Humanism, which it seeks definitely and permanently to ally, has been that of Mr Irving Babbitt and his disciples, notably Mr Norman Foerster. When the crisis comes upon America, as it must, for no material prosperity can permanently postpone it, there will be found writers ready and competent to shoulder the burden of their responsibility. But for the present the English critical activity remains definitely the more interesting and vital. America would do well to pay attention to its problems, for the spiritual

DEUCALION

difficulties facing the two countries are the same, and the solution when found must prove common to both.)

III

CRITICS AS REVIEWERS

Having thus defined the philosophical as the significant critic, clearly to tarry long in consideration of what Mr Orlo Williams calls Practical Critics can result only in a Massacre of the Innocents. The best of them are always worth reading, but in such a period as the present they cannot be called vital. The value of what they say depends less upon a personal degree of intellectual or spiritual penetration than upon education, general knowledge, a natural accord-ance with prevailing "taste", and the exercise of intelligence working on a normal level. They are not concerned with the highest functions of criticism; they only apply principles discovered for them by others. "They are content," Mr Williams says, "to have hazy and inarticulate ideas about ultimate things . . . they are satisfied that from their

DEUCALION

own studies and discussions they have attained to ideas on the subjects which are generally accepted.”¹ Basically journeymen, they perform their most useful service—in addition to their normal routine work as commentators upon contemporary literature—as historians. They select, some of them, high-sounding names, but for their Eagles we feel that Owl would better suit their would-be Solomon wisdom, and their Hawks are too, too Affable.

Let us rather rejoice to see so many of them crowded so comfortably aboard their golden galleon the *London Mercury* (with *Life and Letters* a humble pinnacle in its wake) sailing nowhere in particular² and sailing very well, its jolly captain, Mr J. C. Squire, with the true Nelson touch gallantly setting the telescope to his

¹ *Contemporary Criticism of Literature*, p 95

‘A decade has gone by since it set out to find for all of us the standards of an authoritative criticism, and still we ask in vain of its steersman, Whither, O splendid ship?—No cry from that masthead comes to our ears, and the promised Americas would seem to lie as far as ever below the horizon

LITERARY CRITICISM

blind eye whenever an uncharted coastline heaves into sight, and his jolly mates, Messrs Lynd, Shanks, Priestley, and Burdett, dancing upon the quarter-deck in decorous unanimity with their able Freeman and puffing at their pipes as though they had not a care in the world, while near them hovers the shade, the memory and spirit, of that Ancient Mariner, the late Sir Edmund Gosse, so long their pilot, now their patron-saint.

Sir Edmund Gosse was, it must be insisted, historian, commentator, biographer, rather than critic. The ablest of commentators, the best of literary essayists, bringing to every subject both knowledge and a cultivated taste, and frequently too personal reminiscence, he was always perfectly at his ease. "By dint of gazing interminably over the vast expanse of literature," he confessed in one of his later essays, "I have gradually and unconsciously come to regard with equal interest all forms of passionate expression, whether grave or gay, profound or superficial. I only ask of books that they should be amusing—that is to say, competently enough

DEUCALION

executed to arrest an intelligent observer.”¹ This may seem a wearied, cynical, or even superficial point of view, but certainly it guarantees self-possession. Mr Lynd, a companion spirit, wrote truly of Gosse that he lacked both philosophy and the deepest sympathy, and handled his lightest subjects best; more interested in personalities than literary creation, the probability is that his portraits will outlast his judgments. He might be termed not ungenerously the best of guides for those who see literature as an orchard where fruits are plucked according to taste. He knew all the trees, and could convey the qualities of the various pears and plums and apples admirably. But how they grew, how they came ever to exist, was a mystery known to God perhaps but certainly not to Gosse. He belonged in spirit to an earlier, easier, less urgent age, and the fidelity of Mr Squire and his lieutenants to his method and purposes sets them too irrevocably in the past. The halt speak to the blind.

Mr Squire himself writes admirably

¹ *Leaves and Fruit*, p. vii.

LITERARY CRITICISM

upon all subjects, displaying personality, humour, and sincerity, yet one has no great faith in his discrimination or comparative judgment by any ultimate standard. Who attributed to him the courage of his sentiments was indeed praising him with faint damns. Mr Priestley, Mr Freeman, Mr Burdett, are all excellent introducers, but their perception is horizontal rather than vertical; they are concerned with surfaces. Mr Gerald Gould is best known as a reviewer of novels, a function he performs with amazing vivacity and admirable wit, if an occasional over-aptness to mistake a pun for an opinion. He is happiest in dealing with the main stream of literary effort, and his estimate of the work of the outriders of modern literature is less sure. Mr Shanks has greater insight, but though he gets the meat off the chicken he inclines to make a hash of it in doing so; what his criticism lacks is order, a continuity of theme leading to a single illuminating conclusion. One learns a great deal in reading his essay on Mr H. G. Wells, but is still in the dark as to that most important of problems—

DEUCALION

why Mr Wells was once but is no longer a great *novelist*. Mr Humbert Wolfe is distinguished mainly for his insensitiveness to poetry, as displayed in his encomiums of his misquotations of lines by Mr Eliot and Wilfred Owen.

Mr E. M. Forster, who carries one definitely Bloomsburywards, has more substantial claims to consideration as a critic, but finally he must stand with these others, for it is only his unusual delicacy of perception which conceals a familiar determination to stand no nonsense, and equally with them he begs all those questions of art and psychology raised from various angles and in varying degrees by Messrs Eliot, Read, Richards, and Murry. His final test of a novel is "our affection for it"—which is clearly no test at all. He polishes up the dulled surfaces of familiar truths, and our delight in him is our pleasure at discovering them so brightly and gaily shining. Mrs Woolf may be taken as typical of the Bloomsbury Augustans, practically all of whom, it should be noted, are only incidentally critics. Poised midway between the *London*

LITERARY CRITICISM

Mercury and the *Criterion*, she uses biography for a definite critical end, yet hesitates to plunge into philosophical synthesis; she excels in explanatory or analytic description of a man or a situation, but seldom satisfactorily resolves her analysis or proceeds to general principles. Mr Aldous Huxley invariably exhibits good sense and a pleasing astringency in phrase and judgment. Mr Lytton Strachey too is a typical Augustan, cool and fine in analysis, precise in definition, but as with Mr Huxley the main stream of his energy has never been poured into a purely critical mould. Mr Leonard Woolf (like Mr Desmond MacCarthy in his very different way) has won a deservedly considerable reputation upon a record of mainly journalistic and unreprinted critical work. But of all the Augustans it is true that they are Classicists in a mode which, however it may prevail to-day, is nihilist and not for the future. Flatly sceptical, it leads and can lead nowhere: in essence indeed it belongs to yesterday, seeing—with such writers as Hardy, Ibsen, and Kipling—man as set against

DEUCALION

a blind indifferent background. They deny religion and the religious aspiration: they affirm only non-affirmation. They hold out no hand to those younger writers for whom that background itself becomes increasingly a matter of indifference, and whose interest centres in the personality to the exclusion of the background.

Of the other groups of the Bloomsbury literary life it is unnecessary to write at length; the admirable *Chapbook* is no more, and the last leaf has long been torn from the *Calendar*: *To-day* is one with yesterday, and the *London Aphrodite*, accepting its fate in advance, closed quickly its exhibition of London street-arabesques. Of the *Criterion*, the *Adelphi*, and that one-man-band the *Enemy*, more must be said presently. Nor do the more definitely technical and professorial critics—of the types of Dr Robert Bridges or Mr Percy Lubbock on the one hand, and Messrs George Saintsbury, R. A. Scott-James, John Bailey, and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch on the other—call for detailed attention, while reference may equally be omitted to such isolated,

LITERARY CRITICISM

unrelated phenomena as the smoky brilliancies of Miss Rebecca West and the ultra-feminine Steinish incoherencies of Miss Laura Riding. Everyone of the writers mentioned in the last few pages performs a necessary function in the heterogeneous world of modern letters, but they are not among those who matter most for to-day or to-morrow. Like Aaron, they may amuse the Israelites in the wilderness with golden calves and dancing, but one will never find them ascending the mount in loneliness to bring back the stones of the Commandments, and point the path out of the deserts of the Waste Land.

CRITICS AT WAR

It has been suggested that significance attaches not to all philosophical critics, but only to those whose philosophy is adequate to our needs, and the examination of the problem thereby suggested brings us at once to the crucial point. During the last decade practically all the active critics whose work has any relevance to the immediate necessity have grouped themselves—most conveniently—into opposed camps as Classicists and Romanticists, flying the standards of the *Criterion* and *Adelphi* respectively, with more recently Mr Wyndham Lewis (under the lone banner of the *Enemy*) as an independent skirmisher covering the flank of Classicism in the intervals of blowing his own trumpet. The war has been long but indecisive, personal combats occasional and never final. The Classicist troops have dug themselves in

LITERARY CRITICISM

behind earthworks of comparison and analysis, the Romantic entries—trailing clouds of glory invariably stigmatized as poison gas contrary to all the rules of critical warfare—have been at once more dramatic and more doubtful. Were the matter to be decided upon a census of champions and a statistical record of work achieved, victory would go clearly to Classicism, but the issue is by no means so simple, and there are symptoms of disaffection among even the front-line troops which must be investigated in due course.

But first some definitions and distinctions are necessary. Both Classicism and Romanticism are terms bearing so many varying though allied meanings that it is by no means always easy to be sure which is immediately indicated. (Mr Lewis in particular is apt to label as Romantic *anything* he especially dislikes !) There is a fundamental sense in which Classicism and Romanticism must be regarded as complementary principles, each essential to the other, as respectively formal and vital, static and dynamic, analytic and synthetic, critical and

DEUCALION

creative. Pure Classicism is a deserted temple ; pure Romanticism a fire flaming in the void : the need is to bring the fire to the altar and so beget a living worship. All art is based upon this compromise, and such Romantic anarchists as Blake and Mr D. H. Lawrence are the poorer artists for their rejection of it. In this sense it is true, as M. André Gide says, that the struggle between Classicism and Romanticism exists within every mind, and that from the struggle and according to its intensity the work of art is born. " Classical and Romantic," writes Mr H. J. C. Grierson,

" these are the systole and diastole of the human heart in history. They represent on the one hand our need of order, of synthesis, of a comprehensive yet definite, therefore exclusive as well as inclusive, ordering of thought and feeling and action ; and on the other hand the inevitable finiteness of every human synthesis, the inevitable discovery that, in Carlyle's metaphor, our clothes no longer fit us, that the Classical has

LITERARY CRITICISM

become the conventional, that our spiritual aspirations are being starved.”¹

So Romanticism may be termed, in another borrowed phrase, an aboriginal appetite of the human soul, Classicism an only less primitive necessity of the human mind, and art the needle trembling between these two magnetic poles of the spirit, swaying sometimes to the one, sometimes to the other. “Every Romanticism will be not only a reaction from an old formalism but the parent of a new one,”² and similarly every Classicism will be not only a reaction from an improvident Romanticism but the child and heir of it. It must be agreed with Mr H. P. Collins (a temperamental Classicist acknowledging the Romantic necessity) that in a time of spiritual chaos such as the present the salvation of the modern Romantic spirit lies in discipline and self-control, though what is needed is equally obviously less a Classicist *revival* than a Classicist *development*. We cannot accept a Classicism of

¹ *Background of English Literature*, pp. 287-8.

² *Discoveries*, p. 290.

DEUCALION

the past, whether of the eighteenth century or of Ancient Greece. In such a moment of chaos as ours the only effective possibility is to move forward to a stable but organically vital balance which shall comprehend and be adequate to our deepest experience. Here we have a sense in which the critic, be he what he will by name and nature, appears as essentially Classicist in that his basic function is eternally Classicist. "A new Classical age," the *Criterion* has declared in editorial pseudonymity,

"will be reached when the dogma, or ideology, is so modified by contact with creative writing, and when the creative writers are so permeated by the new dogma, that a state of equilibrium is reached. For what is meant by a Classical moment is surely a moment of *stasis*, when the creative impulse finds a form which satisfies the best intellect of the time, a moment when a type is produced." ¹

In this sense we are all Classicists, as equally we are all Romanticists! The

¹ *Criterion*, April, 1924.

LITERARY CRITICISM

matter is outside the realm of controversy.

In general contemporary critical usage, however, the terms Classical and Romantic are made to bear a much more limited meaning. Mr Middleton Murry makes the distinction philosophical and ethical rather than literary: "The Classical writer feels himself to be a member of an organized society, a man with duties and restrictions imposed upon him by a moral law which he deeply acknowledges. The Romantic is in rebellion against external law, and just as deeply refuses to acknowledge its sanction. He asserts the right of his individuality *contra mundum*."¹ Elsewhere he carries the distinction a stage farther: "Ultimately, I hold that Classicism assumes the existence of God, and strives to understand Him; whereas Romanticism seeks to discover the existence of God, and is content ineffably to know Him. . . . For a true Classicism the existence of God is a real intellectual postulate; for a true Romanticism a real spiritual experience."² And

¹ *Problem of Style*, p. 146.

² *Adelphi*, Feb. 1926.

DEUCALION

again he particularizes: "Catholicism stands for the principle of unquestioned spiritual authority outside the individual; that is also the principle of Classicism in literature."¹ Mr T. S. Eliot, though he deplores as dangerous to all clarity or thought the tendency to confuse literature with religion, has accepted absolutely this final definition, adding: "Those of us who find ourselves supporting what Mr Murry calls Classicism believe that men cannot get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves."² Later he wrote, in reviewing a book by Mr Herbert Read, that the real issue is between those who would "make man the measure of all things, and those who would find an extra-human measure."³ Mr Read is entirely at one with Mr Eliot in seeking the latter, objecting even to the more apparently Classicist Humanism of Mr Irving Babbitt that it does not accept "an absolute severance of things divine and things human", and himself

¹ *Adelphi*, Sept. 1923.

² *Criterion*, Oct 1923.

³ *Criterion*, Oct. 1926.

LITERARY CRITICISM

asserting "that there is no bridging the gap between the finite and the infinite. With Mr T. E. Hulme, who in this matter is so closely echoed by M. Benda, I hold that most of our errors spring from an attempt on our part to gloze over and disguise a particular discontinuity in the nature of reality."¹ Hulme (who though killed in the War was the clear prophet and teacher of post-war Classicism) opposed Romanticism as confusing vital and religious things by abolishing that "absolute discontinuity", and "blurring the clear outline of human relations . . . by introducing in them the *Perfection* that properly belongs to the non-human."² Romanticism deemed man to be "intrinsically good" but "spoilt by circumstance", Classicism "intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent". Classicism was "absolutely identical with the normal religious attitude", while Romanticism, seeking to endow humanity with religious attri-

¹ *Criterion*, Dec 1928.

² *Speculations*, pp. 10-11.

DEUCALION

butes, was "spilt religion". To Classicism man's finitude was the primary fact; Romanticism exalted his infinite possibilities. Such a Romantic Humanism had been, Hulme declared, implicit in all European thought since the Renaissance, when there appeared "a new attitude which can be most broadly described as an attitude of acceptance to life as opposed to an attitude of renunciation. As a consequence of this, there emerges a new interest in man and his relationship to his environment".¹ All subsequent thought comprised "one coherent whole. It all rests on the same presuppositions that were denied by the previous period. It all rests on the same conception of the nature of man, and all exhibits the same complete inability to realize the meaning of the dogma of Original Sin".² As recently as last June in the *New Adelphi*, Mr Eliot went out of his way to commend and support Hulme's definitions.

There is clearly no lack of evidence for asserting the identification of current

¹ *Speculations*, p. 25

² *Speculations*, p. 52

LITERARY CRITICISM

Classicism as represented by the *Criterion* with Catholicism or the Catholic principle, and of current Romanticism as represented by the *Adelphi* with Humanism and the principle of authority inherent in the individual. Here in the very statement of its nature we isolate the reason why victory cannot be to such a Classicism. For the Romanticism which came to life with the Renaissance was a new and a major Romanticism—a Romanticism of the soul—and the new moment of *stasis* which is the primary critical aim must include and not deny this vital spiritual movement. M. Fernandez realizes clearly that we have to-day reached a point in our evolution when Catholicism, that is to say organized religion in any shape or form, becomes meaningless, and “one must either submit or rise up, give up thinking altogether or resign oneself to think to the bitter end”.¹ The root of the Renaissance was a revolt against Catholicism, against authoritarian dogmatism, against the doctrine of Original Sin, and the intel-

¹ *Messages*, p. 267.

DEUCALION

lectual assumption of the existence of God; it was a declaration of a spiritual freedom, of a belief in man, of the sufficiency of a freely conceived Humanism. It called down fire from heaven, not to blast the unbeliever, but to burn in benediction on man's brow, symbol of his acceptance of individual experience as the ultimate and only conceivable reality. The outstanding characteristic of the modern mind is its lack of the Catholic consciousness; its own existence is its only truth, and it achieves that truth only as, and precisely in the degree that, it achieves self-knowledge and self-realization. Acceptance of the existence of God as an intellectual postulate is impossible to it, and if it is incapable of the intimate personal Romanticist experience of God—which many in this moment of transition seem to be—then only the very honest but to some minds superficial scepticism of the Augustans is left to it.

The truth of this assertion is nowhere so strikingly born out as in the cases of those Classicists who, not shirking the final issue, have made the avowal of Catholic acceptance. The immediate

LITERARY CRITICISM

outstanding example is, of course, Mr T. S. Eliot, who from the beginning has asserted the artistic necessity for a living tradition, but who has in actual fact done little to show it as either existent or possible to-day, his poem, *The Waste Land*, was indeed the clearest possible declaration of its non-existence. It was Mr Murry who in 1926 with prophetic insight held it to be possible for Mr Eliot to order the self-torturing and nihilist experiences of that poem on Classical principles only perhaps by such an act of violence as joining the Catholic Church.¹ It is just that act which, to all intents and purposes, *For Lancelot Andrewes* announces. To-day he stands squarely with Hulme in holding the religious conception of ultimate values to be right, the humanist wrong, and in accepting the Catholic dogmas as the closest expression of the religious attitude. But what baffles the non-Catholic observer is the lack of any explanation of the process by which acceptance becomes possible where it was not possible before; the change is announced simply by a

¹ *Adelphi*, Feb 1926

DEUCALION

more and more uncompromising and unsupported statement of controversial sentiments. The essay on *The Humanism of Irving Babbitt* is a case in point, being in purpose a simple questioning of a philosophy of secular Humanism from the viewpoint of one accepting a revealed and dogmatic religion. "It is doubtful," Mr Eliot writes, but offers no evidence, "whether a civilization can endure without a religion, and religion without a Church. . . . For us, religion is of course Christianity; and Christianity implies, I think, the conception of the Church".¹ The issue, in a word, is one of expediency: not whether Catholic dogma be *true*, but whether it will *work*: he is concerned, he declares explicitly, only with the question of whether Humanism is "feasible".

The case of Mr Wyndham Lewis is even more transparent, though where he is concerned it cannot be too strongly insisted that all his critical writing is at bottom the special pleading of a man with an absolute viewpoint. To some extent he himself sees and admits this,

¹ *For Lancelot Andrewes*, pp 140, 142.

LITERARY CRITICISM

but even that does not excuse the degree to which he bases his case purely upon preference, as though that had, after all, the last word. "You will prefer", "it will please you", "what advantage you derive", "a more agreeable belief"—these and similar phrases occur continually in his pages as arguments for acceptance, and even when he comes to the theological problem he makes it appear not a question of evidence or even of conviction, but of the "obvious advantages of a transcendent over an immanent God". He allies himself, with certain reservations, to Catholicism (or more definitely to the Thomist philosophers of the Catholic revival) because he finds it truly secular in contrast to the repulsive "God-hungriness" of modern Romantic mysticism. He arrives in the end at an acceptance of the Catholic God not on any grounds of evidence or of conviction, but because "only with a transcendent God is it possible to secure a true individualism".¹ The inference is surely remarkable, and no less surely deprives Mr Lewis's criticism, philosophically at

¹ *Time and Western Man*, p. 462.

DEUCALION

least, of the claim to be taken seriously. For most men, one would emphasize, belief remains a matter not of what they will, but inexorably of what they must.

Ours is an age of necessity. We must face the facts as they are, not as we might wish them to be. At least it is left to us to be honest. Therefore it is essential to contest whole-heartedly the Classicist tendency to adopt the criterion of what is expedient, feasible, advantageous. It might indeed be easier, more comfortable, could we accept without question upon grounds of intellectual preference alone, but we cannot. To the typical modern mind a strict Classicism is impossible because inapprehensible, incomprehensible, as a reality. Post-Renaissance man is Romantic; for him Romanticism alone serves and follows the necessities of experience with unswerving loyalty, and so to a truly Romantic criticism must he look for his salvation.

It has been and still is urged against Romanticist writers that they practise an interpretative criticism which is denied validity as being too often but the

LITERARY CRITICISM

imposition of a wayward personal fancy upon the known facts—though the only alternative offered is a purely technical or “scientific” criticism of analysis and comparison which however superbly executed cannot approach to a solution of the major problem of our day. For the present, Romanticist criticism is bound to be to some degree interpretative, for since its basis is an autonomous individualism, its immediate task is naturally the creation of an individualist tradition by the discovery and exposition of a series of truly Romantic individuals. Romanticism has to establish itself by proving its truth not as theory, but as fact, and it can only do so by revealing a common pattern in the lives of the greatest men; to object to its tendency, therefore, is to deny it life.

Admittedly the results in practice have not all been happy. Some of Mr Fausset’s earlier work fully deserved the strictures of Mr Orlo Williams upon it as an example of the self-assertive tendency leading criticism astray; his *Tolstoy*, however, though not faultless, was on an altogether higher level. Mr D. H. Lawrence is of

DEUCALION

course nothing if not self-assertive, yet his *Studies in Classical American Literature* deserve more serious attention than they have ever received. Mr W. J. Turner's and Mr J. W. N. Sullivan's studies of Beethoven are much more sober, deepening and enriching appreciation of the great composer's music; and in her *Between the Old World and the New* Miss M. P. Willcocks has produced a series of brilliant "studies in literary personality" which, if they are rather psychological diagnoses than strict literary criticism, do undoubtedly illuminate the actual work of the writers concerned.

It is however in the critical writing of Mr Murry that this type of criticism is seen at its best. Of the writers under discussion, Mr Murry was one of the first (with his study of *Dostoevsky* in 1916) to practise it, and for some years he has stood alone as indubitably the ablest Romanticist critic as is Mr Eliot the most eminent of the "true-blue" Classicists. Even five years ago, when his best work was still unwritten, Mr Orlo Williams did not hesitate to attribute to him "a critical mind of the very first

LITERARY CRITICISM

order, comparable, at its brightest, to that of a Coleridge",¹ and he practises, and at his finest with a superb authority, an intuitional criticism very far removed from the "scientific" analysis of Mr Eliot and his school. His statement of the critical process as he knows it is well worth quoting :

" There are moments when criticism of a particular kind, the only kind I care for, utterly absorbs me. I feel that I am touching a mystery. There is a wall, as it were, of dense, warm darkness before me—a darkness which is secretly alive and thrilling to the sense. This, I believe, is the reflection in myself of the darkness which broods over the poet's creative mind. It forms slowly and gradually gathers while I read his work. The sense of mystery deepens and deepens ; but the quality of the mystery becomes more plain. There is a moment when, as though unconsciously and out of my control, the deeper rhythm of a poet's work, the rise and fall of the

¹ *Contemporary Criticism of Literature*, p 121.

DEUCALION

great moods which determined what he was and what he wrote, enter into me also. I feel his presence; I am obedient to it, and it seems to me as though the breathing of my spirit is at one with his. These are vague words: I have none better to offer at this moment. But I believe that this condition . . . marks a crucial point in the process of understanding an author's work. In one sense it is then and then only that you *know* the work—in this sense you will never know it more; it has now grown into your deepest life-experience.”¹

Setting aside numerous briefer essays, his practice has received a splendid vindication in the profoundest critical work of the last decade, *Keats and Shakespeare*, a book of a scope and integrity which with one single exception in a very different field makes the combined “scientific” criticism of the same period seem a mere pedantic irrelevance. Here is psychological diagnosis which enters absolutely the category of literary criticism by its power to

¹ *Discoveries*, pp. 13-4.

LITERARY CRITICISM

illuminate, to clarify, to dissect, to add meaning not only to each individual poem but to the creative process as an organic whole. Not by a detached but an intense and impassioned application to the poems, the letters, the recorded facts, he recreates the vital development of a Keats who remains convincing long after the book has been put down, and who indeed is seen to be the more truly Keats the more one returns to the poems and letters themselves. *Keats and Shakespeare* is an enduring critical achievement, and it must be asserted of its author that he alone among the prophets of our British Israel has come bearing ponderable gifts won by an appeal to the poets themselves. Taken in mass or in detail, it not only indicates but itself advances far upon the road towards such a constructive Romanticist criticism, awarding literature the highest validity, as we urgently need to-day.

Yet apart from the assessment of results this opposition of types of criticism is significant as well as interesting, reverting as it does to the fundamental polarity already established, and

DEUCALION

also to the possibility—and indeed the indication—of an equatorial compromise. For the Classicist, as Mr Wyndham Lewis roundly declares, the highest knowledge is intellectual (“the intellect has been given to us as the natural appointed path”). Conversely the highest knowledge of the Romanticist must be intuitional, for intuition, as the expression of the complete evolving personality, is alone adequate to the conception presumed by Romanticism of reality as an organic continuous whole—intuition not in its elemental Crocean sense but as the more complex and pondered product of both feeling and intellect. A movement towards acceptance of such an intuition is apparent among many critics who hitherto have acquiesced in the general *Criterion* standpoint, but who find themselves unable to adopt the Catholic solution. Mr Bonamy Dobrée offers only the latest instance of this tendency. It is possible, he agrees,

“to see Mr Eliot’s point of view, to realize the benefit, even the necessity, for some such return, without being able to share the position. Because a

LITERARY CRITICISM

sick man desires health, and sees the necessity for it, it does not follow that he can attain it. Many, myself included, are in the position of the sick man (though not too unhappy about it, and by no means bed-ridden), and moreover, are not prepared to pay the price our cure would require. We would prefer to find health by other means".¹

And he has in the same pages not a little to say concerning that intuition of the artist—equally valid in the critic—which is "not arrived at by reasoning alone", though "it is, with hardly any doubt, the result of thought, probably largely subconscious": an intuition the value of which depends upon the achievement of a right balance between the emotions on the one hand and "previous experience and thought" on the other. M. Fernandez has gone farther, to base all upon intuition, though acknowledging the need for "a strong rational preparation so as not to confound genuine intuition with the phantoms of the imagination":

¹ *Lamp and the Lute*, p. xvi.

DEUCALION

"The superior life begins only at the threshold of intuition. Whatever dialectical or decorative power an intelligence may dispose of, if it does not collide with resistances which are at first inexplicable, and if it is not guided in its work of adjustment by a sort of self-prescience which notifies it of its successes, it cannot escape from the narrow corridor of an impersonal and unverified logic."¹

This is precisely the position which in his latest work Mr I. A. Richards emphatically affirms, accepting without qualification (if also without comment) the Romanticist claim that the final critical choice must be intuitional, that ultimately in the realm of value intuition alone has positive validity. He only in his group, as Mr Murry predominantly in his, has seriously and systematically sought to establish a new and unassailable hierarchy of values based upon a sovereign individualism, and his two major works,

¹ *Messages*, pp 16-7. Mr Herbert Read in his book *Reason and Romanticism* expounded a similar conception of intuition, but he remained in the end, and in the practice of his criticism, indisputably Thomist and intellectual.

LITERARY CRITICISM

Principles of Literary Criticism and *Practical Criticism*, alone in recent critical writing can be compared with Mr Murry's *Keats and Shakespeare* in significance for the future. Therefore, since to the marriage of true methods we can admit no impediments, and taking as our basis this single point of agreement, may it not be possible to combine what is best in the work of these two writers—the objective analysis of the scientific method, the subjective perception of the intuitional—in a common synthesis forging out of the fine metal of the Classicist and the fire of the Romantic that finer critical weapon for which we seek?

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Before it is possible to proceed at all towards such a synthesis one difficulty must be dealt with—the obvious temperamental antagonism existing between Mr Richards and Mr Murry. The former appears to miss few opportunities for a hit at the latter, while perhaps the most superficial essay Mr Murry ever wrote was that on Mr Richard's *Principles of Literary Criticism*, an essay which is not a critical examination of its subject but a travesty. One sentence only is quoted from the book, and frankly there is nothing to suggest that Mr Murry had read any more of it than that sentence! On the other hand a section of the essay is an excellent statement of his own positive position: one which an unbiased study of Mr Richards' work would certainly have made more explicit if not more penetrating.

LITERARY CRITICISM

For fundamentally they work towards similar ends. Both are concerned with the supreme importance of the individual as the sole source of values, recognizing that any constructive theory of values must ask neither theological nor social sanctions, but begin in and proceed from the individual. Both seek the creation of a true organic individuality upon a basis of newly conceived dynamic psychologies which differ one from the other more in the terms in which they are expressed than in essentials. Both resist the ultimate authority of intellectual analysis, and for both there is only one absolute loyalty—to oneself.

Equally they place a superlative value upon poetry and art generally, accepting the poetic utterance as the completest expression of the completest living.¹ Mr Murry holds art to be “but a means—the most potent of all means—of bringing reality nearer to us than we have power to bring it to ourselves”;²

¹ See *Things to Come*, pp 183-4, and *Science and Poetry*, p 35, and works generally

² *Things to Come*, p. 186.

DEUCALION

the ultimate value of the equilibrium which it is the especial function of the art-experience to establish, says Mr Richards "is that it is better to be fully than partially alive".¹ Mr Murry in his essay on Mr Richards seems to take it that as scientist or philosopher the latter resents the poet's claim to "knowledge". The fact is that difference after difference would appear to be a matter solely of terms, and that though in this case Mr Richards may seek to restrict the scope of what he means by "knowledge" he is not attacking the validity of poetry, the understanding of which he seeks wholly to clarify not to confine. No man takes poetry more seriously than he, and like Keats he has never wavered in his faith in poetry as a vehicle of the highest kind of truth, he accepts poetry as a means of attaining a truth which, in Mr Murry's phrase, comprehends and reconciles the partial truths of the divided conscious and unconscious. This is indeed his working method of achieving that full harmony which attains to truth—com-

LITERARY CRITICISM

prehension and reconciliation. Keats said that the poet must "let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts, not a select party", and one could not find a more exact definition of Mr Richards' mode of conciliation, of "yea-saying" to the sum of things, as the foundation of the poetic experience. (Whether it is to be called, with Mr Murry an act of the soul, or with Mr Richards of the whole being—or "the nervous system!"—is again a matter of terms.)

Moreover, the "beautiful-good" man of the Greeks upon whom Mr Murry's position is irreducibly based is clearly and essentially the "harmonious" man who is Mr Richards' ideal. "*The good life is that in which man has achieved a harmony of the diverse elements in his soul.* The good life, we know instinctively, is one of our human absolutes. It is not good with reference to any end outside itself."¹ "The difference between good and evil is the difference between free and wasteful organization, between fullness and narrowness of life. For if the mind is a system of interests, and if an experi-

¹ *Aspects of Literature*, p 8.

DEUCALION

ence is their play, the worth of any experience is a matter of the degree to which the mind, through this experience, attains a complete equilibrium."¹ Here we have another and even more important basis of absolute agreement!

It may be said that the only vital point at which a real gulf appears is in connection with Keats' famous identification of Truth with Beauty, and even here it is less wide than might at first be supposed. It would need an incidental adjustment of phrase rather than radical alteration of meaning to permit Mr Richards to accept Keats' "vast idea" that (in Mr Murry's summing-up)

"the rational faculty was impotent to achieve truth, that intuitive apprehension was the sole faculty by which an ultimate truth could be known, that this truth could be recognized for what it was only by its beauty, that perceptions of beauty were premonitions of a final reality, that the way towards intuitive knowledge lay through a

¹ *Science and Poetry*, p 29

LITERARY CRITICISM

reverence for the instinctive impulses, and somehow in this final knowledge all discords would be reconciled.”¹

The essential difference—and even its validity is by no means assured—lies in Mr Richards’ setting beauty in the eye of the beholder instead of in the object beheld, and perhaps in his restricting the significance of the term “a final reality” to mean simply what may be perceived by the directest possible vision.

For in *The Foundations of Aesthetics* he and his collaborators (Messrs C. K. Ogden and James Wood) declare that what is effected in one by a work of art is a complete and harmonious systematization taking the form of “such an adjustment as will preserve free play to every impulse, with entire avoidance of frustration. In any equilibrium of this kind we are experiencing beauty. . . . As we realize beauty we become more fully ourselves the more fully our impulses are engaged.”² He continues the subject in *Principles of Literary Criticism*: “At

¹ *Keats and Shakespeare*, p. 32.

² Pp. 75, 78.

LITERARY CRITICISM

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¹ *Keats and Shakespeare*, p. 32.

² Pp 75, 78

DEUCALION

the same time since more of our personality is engaged the independence and individuality of other things becomes greater. We seem to see 'all round them', to see them as they really are; we see them apart from any one particular interest which they may have for us." ¹ Normally, he is implying, we see things as we wish to see them, or rather, see those aspects of them which serve our temporary emotional or other needs—but when our needs are satisfied within their own circle, we see them for themselves, and in their reality. Art is achieved when such a vision is evoked in the reader. So art re-establishes a direct contact with life which the necessities of the "stock responses" of normal usage tend to blur and obliterate. But the attainment of such a condition is possible only when the whole being is so organized and balanced internally (and externally too so far as immediate contacts are concerned) as to permit of a concentration of unimpeded discernment.

Thus it may be said that Mr Richards

¹ Pp 251-2.
[80]

LITERARY CRITICISM

believes that though truth may not have inherent beauty, still our perception of it as beautiful is a warrant that we have achieved equilibrium, are fully ourselves, and that therefore we *are* seeing it as it is, truthfully. It might be claimed that Keats inverted and so distorted the true state of affairs, nevertheless his point of a close relationship between truth and beauty is upheld rather than nullified by Mr Richards' criticism.

Yet the gulf is there and cannot be ignored. The great poet, Mr Murry holds, does not *invent* beauty; he discovers and reveals it—that is, it already exists as a quality of reality. Mr Richards on the whole declares it the consequence (product) of harmony in the individual. We have upon one hand a harmony without, on the other a harmony within. Keats and Mr Murry are unable to recognize truth save by beauty, while for Mr Richards beauty is not the sign of truth, but the sign only that he has attained a state of harmony which enables him to see truly. The actual effect of it all is that while Mr Richards

DEUCALION

refuses to accept the world itself as beautiful, he does allow it to be possible for any individual, comparatively independent of circumstance, so to adjust himself that he experiences harmony, beauty, and in consequence sees the world as harmonious and beautiful. It may be a vital distinction but is it a practical difference? In fact Mr Richards' final conclusion will seem to many not merely the only possible but the only desirable outcome of a theory which sets out to be wholly self-supporting, wholly disassociated from anything but the individual and the individual experience, and explanatory of all without stepping outside the circle of strict psychological analysis.

Mr Richards has done valuable work in erecting a criticism capable of describing the value of poetry in terms of the individual alone; Mr Murry, starting from the individual, seeks to relate poetic value to the universe at large. In this sense it may be asserted that Mr Richards offers a necessary, or at any rate a helpful, preliminary to Mr Murry, and that to understand the former is

LITERARY CRITICISM

the more clearly to understand the latter. Conversely, to incorporate Mr Murry's work is to add that without which Mr Richards' cool intellectualism could never achieve more than an extremely restricted appeal.

For Mr Richards is the true critical agnostic, emphatically not denying but only refusing to affirm beyond the scope of what he conceives to be his actual knowledge. *Principles of Literary Criticism* had an effect of being a limiting work because it did not sufficiently define its limits. *Practical Criticism* recognizes its limits clearly, and so is not limiting. The original definition of value is not abandoned in the later volume—it remains basic and undisturbed—but it is set on one side as beyond practical application within “any foreseeable period”; and it is to the other pillar of his theory of criticism, Communication, that he turns as “the one and only goal of all critical endeavours”:

“There is, it is true, a valuation side to criticism. When we have solved, completely, the communication prob-

DEUCALION

lem, when we have got, perfectly, the experience, the mental condition relevant to the poem, we have still to judge it, still to decide upon its worth. But the later question nearly always settles itself; or rather, our own inmost nature and the nature of the world in which we live decide it for us. Our prime endeavour must be to get the relevant mental condition and then see what happens. If we cannot then decide whether it is good or bad, it is doubtful whether any principles, however refined and subtle, can help us much.”¹

This leads inevitably to an acceptance of intuition as the natural and only apprehensive instrument possessing a final positive validity :

“ When we have the poem in all its minute particulars as intimately and as fully present to our minds as we can contrive—no general description of it but the very experience itself present as a living pulse in our bio-

¹ *Practical Criticism*, p. 11.

LITERARY CRITICISM

graphies—then our acceptance or rejection of it must be *direct*. There comes a point in all criticism where a sheer choice has to be made without the support of any arguments, principles or general rules. All that arguments and principles can do is to protect us from irrelevancies, red-herrings, and disturbing preconceptions. . . . They may preserve us from bad arguments but they cannot supply good ones.”¹

There, in that last sentence, Mr Richards defines his function. In the default of a “sufficient sincerity”, the “exercise of thought” remains essential as a safeguard against the vagaries of personal eccentricity, and in his two major volumes is offered the most efficient and elaborate instrument of “rational preparation” to be found anywhere in current critical writing. Essentially its purpose is negative, but as has been said, it rises above its limits by clearing acknowledging them. Mr Richards applies a “scientific” technique to a definitely Romanticist

¹ *Practical Criticism*, pp. 302-3.

DEUCALION

purpose; he can only be termed a Classicist in the broader sense that Classicism is always a technique for the schooling of uncontrolled Romanticism.

Mr Murry is indispensable to supply the positive aspect. Writing of just such criticism as Mr Richards practises, he says that though it may "assume that poetry is the highest expression of the spiritual life of man", still "it makes no endeavour to assess it according to the standards that are implicit in such an assumption. That is the function of philosophical criticism. If philosophical criticism can be combined with criticism of method" (as in the work of Coleridge and Arnold) "so much the better; but it is philosophical criticism of which we stand in desperate need at this moment."¹ Mr Richards may to some extent convict Mr Murry of mystification and emotive utterance, but he overlooks the positive contribution. *Keats and Shakespeare* is full of emotive utterance, but on Mr Richards' implied admission such states as the book describes could not be conveyed by intellectual analysis. Mr Murry's

¹ *Aspects of Literature*, p 180.

LITERARY CRITICISM

methods may be dangerous, but they would appear to be necessary! For though Mr Richards provides a measure of proportional value, he insufficiently relates it to human absolutes. (Incidentally, his applied criticism is rather less satisfactory than his pure theory.) He supplies a standard, but it is not one which can give us what we most urgently need—a tradition. It is that which Mr Murry is supplying, seeking as a true philosophical critic to recognize values based upon individuality, and from them to establish the only tradition modern Romanticism can of its nature admit—a hierarchical tradition of prototypes.

“Take all the heroes of humanity; choose from among them those who have made the deepest and most permanent appeal to men, try to discover what those men really were; if you can discover it, that is what man *is*. . . . Let us suppose—to take a single example—that we find that some of the most mysterious utterances of Jesus concerning that Kingdom of Heaven that is within us prove to be

DEUCALION

faithful descriptions of what other lonely heroes have had to endure in their living lives; let us suppose we find that at the crucial moment when the man becomes a saint, or the poet a great poet, we find them all with the same sense of utter isolation and abandonment, of an annihilation that they can describe only as the darkness of a veritable death, from which they are as it were reborn;—then, I think, we can fairly claim to have proved something that is of importance to men. I do not say that this is proved. But I have come to believe that it can be proved.”¹

Keats and Shakespeare was the first step towards such a proof, demonstrating, as its title suggests, an identity between the two great poets. Elsewhere he has sought to show a similar identity between Shakespeare and Jesus: “Jesus at one end, Shakespeare at the other, of the Christian epoch—and both free of it. . . . I know of no two spirits more profoundly

¹ *Things to Come*, pp. 25, 27-8.

LITERARY CRITICISM

alike than theirs".¹ Less elaborately he has indicated it in others—Melville, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Tchekhov. The distinction must be made and maintained that Mr Murry is infinitely removed from that more familiar figure—the moralist critic seeking to draw support for his own particular morality from a poem or a poet, and to read a pre-conceived lesson into art. His position is that art expresses the ultimate vision of the profoundest being, and that the first duty of the critic is to be true to that vision and that being, wherever they may lead him. He attributes to them no desire to teach,² and it is incidental—though of course fundamental to his constructive critical position—that the lives of the greatest poets should seem to follow a single type-course.

The value of his criticism rests solely upon his fidelity not to his theory but

¹ *Things to Come*, p. 153.

² Since for Mr Murry the artist is the highest type of man, art must obviously in its revelation of the artist point a way to the highest type of life—only to that extent would he seek to present art as moral.

DEUCALION

to his poets, and in each and every case it should be subjected to the relentless probing of Mr Richards' technical instrument. If bad arguments exist, let that instrument find them out; it will not touch the sound ones, and the essay which will not bear such an inquisition deserves to be destroyed. Thus we establish another sense in which Mr Richards is complimentary and essential to Mr Murry. It is Mr Richards' function to give the completest power and validity to intuition, schooling it in its primary steps towards "a sufficient sincerity". His is the task of preparing the caravan for the wilderness, once it is embarked, and the stony aridities of the Waste Land lie about it, then to Mr Murry must we look for leadership.

The criticism of the immediate future, it may be suggested, will lie in and about the fields of the work of these two men. Certainly it will have to take Mr Richards wholly into account, but it will have to realize too that he offers at best but preparation, and that to move forward a fuller validity must be granted to

LITERARY CRITICISM

the findings of the intuitive critic.¹ A more detailed and definite explication is needed of poetry (that is, of art in all its aspects) as the organic harmonious expression of the organic harmonious personality. But the first and the final necessity is the establishment of a new tradition of values proper to Post-Renaissance Man, a tradition (such as is already indicated) of individuals working from a generally chaotic and only occasionally harmonious perception of things, through a desolate period of fearful questioning, to an at first painful but ultimately triumphant vision and acceptance of life as it is and for what it is. Nothing less must it achieve if civilization itself is not to collapse and perish—for

¹ In this connection may be noted the current gathering reaction against the scientific materialism of the past century in religion, psychology, sociology, and art, and the insistence on the individual as the moral unit and and the source of all acceptable values, to be discerned in the work of such widely discussed and various writers as Messrs Havelock Ellis, J. C. Smuts, A. N. Whitehead, J. W. N. Sullivan, Lawrence Hyde, Henry Chester Tracy, and Count Keyserling.

DEUCALION

men cannot live without some promise of satisfaction and fulfilment. No movement of the pure intellect is able to offer any such promise: in art alone may it be found to-day.

EPILOGUE

The measurable future of criticism, it would seem, must resemble that of the king in the story who gave his life to making his kingdom a republic! Its present urgent task is the establishment from the study of the literature and thought of the day and of the past a new life-conception, a new "world-idea", a new scale of values to replace those which the events and mental developments of the last four centuries have irrevocably shattered. "The shell of Christendom is broken"—and no power can possibly replace it whole upon the wall again. We must look forward, not back, for our synthesis. When at last that synthesis shall be consummated, when there shall appear the new "moment of *stasis*" wherein the highest creative impulse may find a form to satisfy it, flowing forward naturally in its own proper channels, then criticism (no longer absorbing energy upon which it has no true

DEUCALION

claim) will once more become what it rightly should be, a secondary and not as to-day a primary activity.

Nevertheless it will and must remain ever wakeful, ever watchful. Such a "moment of *stasis*" can be of its nature, and compared to the countless centuries of the history of man, but a moment. In that more distant hour, when equilibrium dissolves again in chaos, and there comes upon man some new dark night of the soul, then will criticism, that DEUCALION of the spirit, not fail to emerge as the still vigilant guardian not only of literary but of intrinsic human values.

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CLASSIFIED INDEX

GENERAL

	PAGE
Daedalus, or Science and the Future. J. B. S. Haldane	5
Icarus, or the Future of Science. Bertrand Russell	5
Tantalus, or the Future of Man. F. C. S. Schiller	5
The World, the Flesh and the Devil. J. D. Bernal	19
Quo Vadimus? Glimpses of the Future. E. E. Fournier D'Albe	6
Socrates, or the Emancipation of Mankind. H. F. Carlill	12
What I Believe. Bertrand Russell	5
Sibylla, or the Revival of Prophecy. C. A. Mace	10
The Next Chapter. André Maurois	13
Kalki, or the Future of Civilization. S. Radhakrishnan	17
Diogenes, or the Future of Leisure. C. E. M. Joad	16
The Dance of Civa, Life's Unity and Rhythm. Collum	8

MARRIAGE AND MORALS.

Hypatia, or Woman and Knowledge. Dora Russell	6
Lysistrata, or Woman's Future and Future Woman. A. M. Ludovici	6
Hymen, or the Future of Marriage. Norman Haire	13
Thrasymachus, or the Future of Morals. C. E. M. Joad	6
Halcyon, or the Future of Monogamy. Vera Brittain	19
Birth Control and the State. C. P. Blacker	9
Romulus, or the Future of the Child. R. T. Lewis	17
Lares et Penates, or the Home of the Future. H. J. Birnstingl	15

SCIENCE AND MEDICINE

Gallio, or the Tyranny of Science. J. W. N. Sullivan	12
Archimedes, or the Future of Physics. L. L. Whyte	14
Eos, or the Wider Aspects of Cosmogony. J. H. Jeans	16
Hermes, or the Future of Chemistry. T. W. Jones	14
Prometheus, or Biology and the Advancement of Man. H. S. Jennings	7
Galatea, or the Future of Darwinism. W. Russell Brain	7
Apollonius, or the Future of Psychical Research. E. N. Bennett	12
Sisyphus, or the Limits of Psychology. M. Jaeger	19
Metanthropos, or the Future of the Body. R. C. Macfie	16
Morpheus, or the Future of Sleep. D. F. Fraser-Harris	15
The Conquest of Cancer. H. W. S. Wright	7
Automaton, or the Future of Mechanical Man. H. S. Hatfield	7

INDUSTRY AND THE MACHINE

Ouroborus, or the Mechanical Extension of Mankind. G. Garrett	9
Vulcan, or the Future of Labour. Cecil Chisholm	13
Typhoeus, or the Future of Socialism. Arthur Shadwell	17
Hephaestus, or the Soul of the Machine. E. E. Fournier D'Albe	6
Artifex, or the Future of Craftsmanship. John Gloag	9
Pegasus, or Problems of Transport. J. F. C. Fuller	9
Aeolus, or the Future of the Flying Machine. Oliver Stewart	12
Wireless Possibilities. A. M. Low	8

WAR

Janus, or the Conquest of War. William McDougall	13
Callinicus, a Defence of Chemical Warfare. J. B. S. Haldane	5

FOOD AND DRINK

Lucullus, or the Food of the Future. Olga Hartley and C. F. Leyel	10
Bacchus, or the Future of Wine. P. Morton Shand	14

CLASSIFIED INDEX

SOCIETY AND THE STATE

	PAGE
rchon, or the Future of Government. Hamilton Fyfe . . .	13
ain, or the Future of Crime George Godwin . . .	15
utolycus, or the Future of Miscreant Youth R. G. Gordon . . .	17
ycurgus, or the Future of Law. E. S. P. Haynes . . .	8
tentor, or the Press of To-Day and To-Morrow D. Ockham . . .	12
untius, or Advertising and its Future Gilbert Russell . . .	9
usticus, or the Future of the Countryside Martin S. Briggs . . .	13
rocrustus, or the Future of Education. M. Alderton Pink . . .	10
lma Mater, or the Future of the Universities. Julian Hall . . .	17
is, or the Future of Oxford. W. J. K. Diplock . . .	19
pella, or the Future of the Jews. A Quarterly Reviewer. . .	11
utyachus, or the Future of the Pulpit. Winifred Holtby . . .	17
icisti Galilaeae? or The Church of England E. B. Powley . . .	18

GREAT BRITAIN, THE EMPIRE, AND AMERICA

assandra, or the Future of the British Empire F. C. S. Schiller . . .	6
aledonia, or the Future of the Scots. G. Malcolm Thomson . . .	14
lbyn, or Scotland and the Future. C. M. Grieve . . .	14
ibernia, or the Future of Ireland. Bolton C. Waller . . .	15
olumbia, or the Future of Canada. George Godwin . . .	18
chates, or Canada in the Empire. W. Eric Harris . . .	18
niva, or the Future of India R. J. Minney . . .	17
ato's American Republic. J. Douglas Woodruff . . .	10
idas, or the United States and the Future. C. H. Bretherton . . .	9
tlantis, or America and the Future. J. F. C. Fuller . . .	9

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

omona, or the Future of English. Basil de Selincourt . . .	11
reaking Priscian's Head. J. Y. T. Greig . . .	15
urs Porsena, or the Future of Swearing Robert Graves . . .	11
elphos, or the Future of International Language E. Sylvia Pankhurst . . .	12
heherazade, or the Future of the Novel John Carruthers . . .	14
amyris, or Is There a Future for Poetry? R. C. Trevelyan . . .	7
ie Future of Futurism. John Rodker . . .	11
rs. Fisher, or the Future of Humour. Robert Graves . . .	11
ons Asinorum, or the Future of Nonsense. George Edinger . . .	19
amocritus, or the Future of Laughter. Gerald Gould . . .	19

ART, ARCHITECTURE, MUSIC, DRAMA, ETC.

iterpe, or the Future of Art. Lionel R. McCollvin . . .	8
oteus, or the Future of Intelligence. Vernon Lee . . .	8
ilbus, or the Future of Architecture. Christian Barman . . .	11
pheus, or the Music of the Future. W. J. Turner . . .	10
rpander, or Music and the Future. E. J. Dent . . .	10
rydice, or the Nature of Opera. Dyneley Hussey . . .	18
noclastes, or the Future of Shakespeare. Hubert Griffith . . .	14
motheus, or the Future of the Theatre. Bonamy Dobrée . . .	8
rachthus, or the Future of Films. Ernest Betts . . .	16

SPORT AND EXPLORATION

alanta, or the Future of Sport. G. S. Sandilands . . .	15
rtuna, or Chance and Design. Norwood Young . . .	16
unno, or the Future of Exploration. J. L. Mitchell . . .	16

MISCELLANEOUS

rcissus, an Anatomy of Clothes. Gerald Heard . . .	7
rseus, of Dragons. H. F. Scott Stokes . . .	8

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